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ABSTRACT

This guide is written for teenagers who may be considering becoming active in their communities. It explains ways teens can increase their power and effectiveness in community life and some of the things they will encounter along the way. It begins by emphasizing the importance of community service, illustrating the ways that teens already may be involved. The guide helps teenagers identify reasons they might want to get further involved. It describes the use of community forums among local leaders and other concerned citizens, including youth, to determine community needs and the best approaches to help meet them. Citizen action to bring about social change involves four primary types of activities: organizing, "knowing your stuff," public education, and lobbying officials. Advising policymakers is another method of influencing policy. Public hearings, written commentary, advisory committees, and special meetings are all types of political-advisory activities. Electoral participation is the most basic form of U.S. citizen participation. Volunteer community service and organizing volunteer efforts are also examples of community commitment. The guide offers tips for developing skills for effective community action. Such skills include becoming an active learner and basing one's performance on a set of commonly shared principles and values. Good planning is key to any successful community-action project. Other skills include running effective meetings, persuasive letter-writing, using the telephone effectively, making well planned presentations before public officials, using existing agencies and networks, and publicizing projects. (TES)

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TEEN POWER

A Users Guide for Youth Community Involvement

by

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prepared for

Youth as Advocates for Youth

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Stephen Mullen

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Teen Power	1
The Importance of Community Service	2
Why get involved?	4
Determining Community Needs	7
Major Approaches to Community Participation	11
About Citizen Action	13
Advising Policy Makers	21
Electoral Participation	25
Volunteer Community Service	28
The Action Clinic	33
Becoming an Active & Critical Learner	34
The Practical Meaning of Values	34
How to Plan for Action	36
How to Run an Effective Meeting	37
How to write a Persuasive Letter	39
How to use the Telephone Effectively	40
How to Make Presentations Before Public Officials	42
How to use Networks and Coalitions	43
How to Publicize your Cause or Project	46

TEEN POWER

A lot is written about the problems of teenagers today. This guide is different because it recognizes your power as a teenager to solve the problems you and other teens face as well as many problems in your community:

Sure, teenagers have problems, but so do adults. The important thing to realize is that youth are people with RESOURCES who can help each other and improve conditions in their community. Too many adults, and young people, have naive and negative views about youth. What America needs as we enter the 1990's and grow toward the 21st Century is a positive understanding of the capacity of young people to be a part of solutions rather than the source of problems. The challenge all Americans face, young and old alike, is to empower teens to be helpers rather than assuming that their only role is to receive help.

This guide begins with the knowledge and belief that you as a teenager can help your schools, community, and nation in three important ways:

- You can make important and thoughtful contributions in shaping public policies (in your school, community, and state), especially in addressing issues that effect youth.
- You and your friends have a great reservoir of talent and energy that can be channeled to provide volunteer service to help people in need and to improve community life.
- You possess special knowledge, sensitivity, and skill in helping other teens.

The TEEN POWER GUIDE is written for you and other teens who want to, or may be considering becoming involved in community life. It explains some of the things in community life that you will encounter and it suggests ways that you can increase your power, influence and effectiveness.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY SERVICE

You may or may not be involved in a community service activity now. Whether you are or are not, you will continuously face opportunities to get involved or more involved in the future. The fact is that 50% of Americans volunteer. Our community and our nonprofit institutions depend on volunteers who provide hundreds of millions of dollars per year in services.

Your community and the quality of your life would not be the same without volunteer community service. For example, consider what community life would be like without volunteers to coach Little League; advise 4-H groups, Boy and Girls Clubs, the Scouts, the YMCA, YWCA, and YMHA, Junior Achievement, etc.; give blood for hospitals to use; serve on Church Boards; raise scholarships for young people; mentor and tutor youth in need; run self help groups like Alcoholics Anonymous or Parents without Partners; establish centers for the homeless and for battered women; build and maintain recreational areas; run Special Olympics programs for the disabled; read and provide rides and home care assistance for the elderly; organize and chaperone dances for young people; speak out to protect the environment or to advance the rights of minorities; help run-away youth; organize community festivals and cultural exhibits; and assist such institutions as museums, hospitals, symphony orchestras, and schools.

Local government also would not be the same if people did not vote, run for office, help candidates, serve on Boards or Commissions, or help such government supported institutions as the Library, Recreation Department, Conservation and Planning Commissions, and Public Health Boards.

Your school would also be a very different place if you and other youth did not get involved as volunteers. What would your school be like without class officers, the student council, sport teams, dances, booster clubs, the band, and the student newspaper, to name but a few activities that depend upon volunteer support.

The important thing for all Americans to remember is that community participation and service is the key to making our democracy and communities work. We all benefit from it. Without it, our freedom and quality of life would be diminished. WITHOUT VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION THERE WOULD BE

NO DEMOCRACY AND MOST OF OUR COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS WOULD VANISH.

Because community participation is so necessary in our society, it is important that every citizen develop a commitment to and view public service as a part of their life. This guide is written with the hope that you will begin, increase, or continue your involvement in serving your community. It also aims to help you better understand the personal benefits you will gain from community service, the options for service that are available to you, and the ways in which your service can be most successful.

WHY GET INVOLVED?

There are many reasons to get involved in community life and the reasons may change during your lifetime. As you make initial choices about becoming involved, it is helpful to understand the reasons people get involved in the community. Understanding these reasons helps you to select volunteer activities, and to be clear about what you would like to get out of it.

The two major reasons people get involved in community life are personal and social. From a personal point of view it makes practical sense to get involved because you can get a lot of benefits. From a social point of view you should get involved because you will be able to give something back to your community and/or you can address issues, needs, or values you care about that call for attention and action.

In practice, people usually decide to volunteer for a variety of personal and social reasons. Among the most important reasons people get involved are the following:

10 REASONS FOR VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

1. **FRIENDSHIP:** People often volunteer because they are asked, they want to be with friends, or they want to make new friends;
2. **ENJOYMENT:** Volunteering can be a satisfying way of engaging in a particular interest or hobby. It can also make a person feel good about themselves and being a part of their community.
3. **LEARNING:** People can gain confidence, new knowledge or specific skills that can be helpful in their careers or personal life;
4. **CAREER EXPLORATION:** Volunteering provides a way to become exposed to a potential career field or role;
5. **MAKING CONTACTS:** People can get to know others who may be able to help them in their careers or in other ways;

6. **GAINING CREDENTIALS:** Volunteer involvement often provides credentials for college, jobs, and promotions;
7. **IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF COMMUNITY LIFE:** People volunteer to improve the environmental, cultural, or recreational resources of their neighborhood or community;
8. **IMPROVING POLITICAL AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS:** Volunteer involvement is often undertaken to assure or improve the quality and effectiveness of political or social institutions such as churches, schools, hospitals, youth serving agencies, etc.;
9. **ADDRESSING ISSUES:** People often get involved because they are concerned about a particular issue or value they feel requires attention and action; and
10. **HELPING THOSE IN NEED:** Volunteer involvement is a way to offer a helping hand to individuals with a need or problems.

There are several practical reasons why it is important to understand these different reasons why people get involved in community volunteer activities:

First, it will help you and your friends decide upon the type of activity you want to engage in;

Second, it will help you to recruit others by making clear to them the potential benefits and variety of activities in which they can become involved;

Third, it helps those who manage volunteer activities to be responsive to the varied interests of different volunteers.

AN EXERCISE

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO GET OUT OF COMMUNITY SERVICE?

We are all motivated by personal and social reasons for getting involved in community activity. To test your own motivation, following is a list of 6 personal reasons to get involved and 4 social reasons. Think about all 10 reasons. Then in column #1, list the most important specific interest or goal you have at this time. (For example, under FRIENDSHIP you might say, "To meet other kids who share my values," or, under IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF COMMUNITY LIFE you might say, "To help provide more recreational activities for teenagers in my town on the weekend.")

After you finish your list of 10 items, study it. Then rank them in priority order, with #1 being most important to #10 being the least important. What does this tell you about what you are interested in doing and what you want to get out of it?

<u>MOTIVATING REASON</u>	<u>COLUMN #1</u> YOUR SPECIFIC INTERESTS OR GOALS	<u>COLUMN #2</u> PRIORITY RANKING
1. FRIENDSHIP	_____	_____
2. ENJOYMENT	_____	_____
3. LEARNING	_____	_____
4. CAREER EXPLORATION	_____	_____
5. MAKING CONTACTS	_____	_____
6. GAINING CREDENTIALS	_____	_____
7. IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF COMMUNITY LIFE	_____	_____
8. IMPROVING POLITICAL AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS	_____	_____
9. ADDRESSING ISSUES	_____	_____
10. HELPING THOSE IN NEED	_____	_____

DETERMINING COMMUNITY NEEDS

There are two major patterns of how people get involved in community service activities. One pattern is to respond to a request or a situation that concerns you. The other pattern is to consciously select a community service activity by studying alternatives.

There are benefits to both of these approaches. It is important to have citizens who will pitch in to help when they are asked or who will somehow find the time to respond to a particular community need that might arise. Our communities need responsive citizens.

There is also a benefit of having citizens who will focus their community service efforts over time to provide depth and continuity in undertaking a volunteer service activity. Also, it is helpful to have groups of citizens, youth or adults, who share a common commitment to their community, decide to select one particular area of community need to which they will devote their shared efforts.

What is particularly helpful in community life is to have individual citizens and groups who take the time to do some research about the needs in their community.

AN IDEA

COMMUNITY CONSENSUS AND AGENDA BUILDING: An idea that might be right for your community

One of the problems in a lot of communities is that leaders and citizens never sit down together to figure out the priority needs of their community and the directions for its future. One way to address this need is to organize a COMMUNITY FORUM among leaders and concerned citizens to agree upon major community needs, goals, priorities, and action steps. To get more widespread community participation, a questionnaire can be mailed, distributed, or printed in the newspaper to identify concerns, suggestions, and commitments from citizens. Also, schools, churches, and local civic groups can be asked to discuss these issues and to present their ideas at a COMMUNITY FORUM. The forum can be held for one day, two days, or through a series of meetings. The most important outcome is for different organization (business, government agencies, religious groups, nonprofit agencies, educational institutions, and civic groups) to pledge to carry out action steps.

SOME TIPS

- 1) One or a couple of groups need to initiate the process and then build a coalition of respected influential leaders to support it;
- 2) Youth should be involved. In fact, a group of young people could initiate the Forum;
- 3) Be sure to do homework. Obtain facts and figures;
- 4) Don't be afraid of disagreement, it's healthy; but be sure to get some resource people (consultants, teachers, clergy) who are good at running good group meetings; and
- 5) Follow-up, keep track and publicize progress, and bring the group together once or twice a year to celebrate success and revise the agenda.

The reason for this is to be sure that efforts are devoted to real needs. Since there is just so much time each of us can spend helping others and the community, we should be sure our efforts are really needed and are important. A common mistake some community groups make is to launch a community service project that is not needed.

How do you or a group to which you belong determine important needs in your community? Among community need assessment approaches you might use are the following:

- **NEWSPAPER REVIEW:** Read back issues of your community newspaper and make a list of the most frequently reported community problems.

TIPS: 1) Cut out and save articles;

2) Make a list of the names of reporters or people who are quoted that know something about the problems because you may want to contact them; and

3) Make a list of the organizations that are quoted that are concerned about or involved with the problem.

- **INTERVIEWS:** Meet with important government, religious, business, civic, and educational leaders and ask them to identify the most important needs in your community.

TIPS: 1) Begin with a small initial list and ask each leader to suggest the names of others you should interview;

2) Take good notes;

3) Ask each person if they know of anything that is written about each need; and

4) Ask what community groups are concerned about, their needs, and the name of one or two leaders of the group.

- **READ BACKGROUND MATERIAL:** Obtain and study reports or studies that might tell you about community needs.

TIPS: 1) Ask for help from your local library. If you have a large library or a college library nearby, ask for help from a **REFERENCE LIBRARIAN**. Also, the **GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS** section of a large library may be of help;

- 2) Ask key local agencies such as the School Department, Public Health Department, and Public Welfare Department of your city or town, the local United Way, or Chamber of Commerce for materials.

- **OPINION SURVEY:** Develop and send a questionnaire to leaders of community institutions asking them to identify the most important community needs and ways to address them.

TIPS: 1) Get a book about survey research from the library or have a teacher, local college professor, or person who works in the area of market research help you design a good and user-friendly survey;

- 2) Write a good cover letter explaining why you are doing the survey and how you plan to use the results;
- 3) Try out (field test) the survey questionnaire and make appropriate revisions; and
- 4) Keep it as short as possible.

MAJOR APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Once you, or a group to which you belong, is clear about community needs you would like to help address through community service, you will have to determine the most appropriate types of activities. In part your choice may be influenced by considering some of the personal and social motives described earlier. In part, the choice should be influenced by your understanding of the real needs in your community.

There is one other important consideration you may also find helpful, and that is to consider the different ways in which people get involved in community life. This is particularly important to understand because there are significant differences in style, activities, and conditions associated with different approaches to participating in community life.

Following is a brief description of four major approaches to community participation:

CITIZEN ACTION involves speaking out on an issue. It is primarily concerned with influencing officials to respond to a particular need. It may also involve educating the public or organizing a network of supporters to advocate for action. Citizen Action includes such activities as research, lobbying, educating the public, grassroots organizing, and obtaining media coverage. Citizen action is a grassroots effort to be heard and to push for change on one or several issues of public policy.

ADVISING POLICY-MAKERS is a matter of assisting government administrators or legislators when they ask for help. The most common forms of this type of citizen involvement are serving on advisory committees, testifying at public hearings, participating in government sponsored meetings, or providing written commentary on policies that government officials are developing. Whereas citizen action is a matter of influencing government from the outside, advising policy-makers is a process of helping government within the guidelines its leaders establish.

ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION, the third type of community participation, includes voting, supporting a candidate, working to support or oppose a referenda issue, or even running for office. Electoral participation is politics with a big P. It is controversial, emotional, and adversarial. Electoral participation often has a lot of conflict and competition, but it is an arena in which individuals can have considerable influence.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE includes doing specific things to help individuals, community organizations, or the community as a whole. This area of participation calls for providing direct services.

You can participate in community life in one, several, or all of these four areas. Because people have different temperaments and interests, some areas may be more appealing or comfortable than others. In thinking about these areas, it is important to realize:

1. Our American political and social system cannot survive unless a large number of citizens participate in each of these areas;
2. It is helpful to learn as much as possible about participation in each of these areas because different kinds of community needs call for different approaches;
3. While the ideal is for every citizen to participate in all four areas, you can learn a lot about yourself and your community by selecting or participating in a project or activity in one or several areas;
4. Teens bring a unique capacity for power and influence in each area. Youth with conviction, dedication, and integrity can have a great impact on community life. Youth who care and have the moxie to follow through and act on their convictions will attract attention, respect, and support. When it comes to making a difference in the community, being young is an advantage rather than a liability.

ABOUT CITIZEN ACTION

Citizen Action are initiatives we undertake to bring about changes that we believe will preserve important values or improve our community or society. Citizen Action usually involves a challenge to change or establish a law, a rule, or a program. Citizen Action includes speaking out, making the public aware, organizing support, and trying to influence officials to act in a certain way.

The major social movements of the late 20th century are all examples of Citizen Action. The Civil Rights movement, the environmental movement, the consumer rights movement, the anti-war movement, the disabilities movement, the women's movement, the peace movement, and the movement to advance the interests of the elderly are all expressions of Citizen Action.

Citizen Action is often controversial because it involves challenging the status quo and arrangements in which people have a vested interest. Citizen Action is often very strenuous because initiatives are often opposed and the integrity, motivation, patriotism, and common sense of citizen advocates are often challenged. Citizen Action is not for the faint of heart.

MAJOR ACTIVITIES: There are four major types of activities associated with Citizen Action. These are:

ORGANIZING: There is power in numbers. To bring about change it is necessary to create enough workers and support to make an impact. Almost all effective citizen action comes through the efforts of existing advocacy organizations or by creating new ones. To create a new organization, or continue an existing one, it requires obtaining financial support, members, a good plan, and enough staff or volunteers to accomplish the organization's objectives.

- TIPS.**
- 1) It is helpful to have a good title or acronym for a new organization (For example, S.O.S. is the acronym for the organization "Save Our Seashore");
 - 2) Internal politics and in-fighting can weaken an organization. Always be aware of this. Get a good advisor, consultant, or observer to help evaluate and keep

your organization healthy as you develop;

- 3) Recruit as many members as soon as possible. A petition drive is a good way to identify potential members. Get their addresses. Send out mailings. Ask original members to recruit 5 or 10 others. Have a very modest membership fee in the beginning;
- 4) Communicate, Communicate, Communicate. Keep in touch with members often. Even a one page newsletter sent regularly will do the trick;
- 5) Find things for people to do. Create meaningful projects. Ask for volunteers and acknowledge their efforts. Thank them personally. Thank them by letter and in newsletters;
- 6) Achieve early victories. Select one or two things you can achieve or win at. It will boost credibility and attract more followers; and
- 7) Share power. Find ways for more and more people to take prominent roles and credit in the organization.

KNOW YOUR STUFF: When you are an advocate you have to know what you are talking about. Your credibility and effectiveness depends upon it. Therefore, you must obtain, study, and understand information about the issue or issues with which you are concerned. There are four kinds of information that are particularly helpful to people engaged in citizen action: basic knowledge about an issue, particular information about the nature of the issue in one's community, successful and unsuccessful approaches in dealing with the issue, and existing and proposed policies that address the issue. In addition to the suggestions made earlier in the section on assessing community needs, you may find the following suggestions helpful.

- TIPS:**
- 1) Study issues in school. Use assignments as opportunities to pursue issues. Ask your teachers to devote more attention to issues that concern you;

- 2) See if you can get extra credit in some of your classes for doing a paper, book report, or project on an issue of concern to you;
- 3) Attend continuing education courses, conferences, or workshops;
- 4) Read the major and most influential books on the issue;
- 5) Subscribe to magazines and newsletters that address the issue;
- 6) Read the newspaper daily and cut out relevant articles;
- 7) Ask public officials to send you copies of relevant existing or pending legislation or regulations;
- 8) Find one or two adults who know a lot about the issue to help you and keep you informed;
- 9) Keep files with folders on different aspects of the subject;
- 10) Organize an interest group to study different aspects of an issue;
- 11) Talk with members of organizations that share your concern; and
- 12) Join and read the materials available through these organizations.

CLARIFIER

What is a policy? Citizen Action is almost always concerned with issues of policy.

The word policy comes from the Greek word "polis" which means city. Policies are principles and rules that guide community life. Our federal government makes policies through Congress, the administrative branch, and the Court system. Your city, town, or County establishes policies. Your school has policies as do other organizations in your community such as churches and youth agencies.

Policies are of two major types: regulatory and distributional. Regulatory policies are ones that permit or forbid people or institutions from doing different things. For example, not allowing students to smoke in school is a regulatory policy to protect public health. Banning the use of certain pesticides is an example of a federal or state regulatory policy. Allowing people to have a rally in front of city hall is a local regulatory policy.

Distributional policies have to do with money to provide services, programs, or activities. When the U.S. Congress passes a Federal Highway Bill it is a distributional policy. If your town decides to turn a vacant lot into a playground, it is such a policy. Your school would make a distributional policy if the school committee approved a new course in Environmental studies.

EDUCATING THE PUBLIC: Those who engage in citizen action almost always have to attract support from the public. They need to demonstrate that their will is the will of the people. To attract public support about an issue, citizen activists need to achieve three goals:

To Make the Public Aware of an Issue

To Get the Public to Accept a Preferred Solution

To Get the Public to Act in Support of the Solution

These three goals of public education call for different strategies and

approaches. For example, to make the public aware you have to get their attention. Since there is a lot of competition for public attention, you may need to dramatize an issue by publishing a report or holding an event such as a conference, rally, or march. You can also increase public awareness by having exhibits in public places such as shopping malls, grocery stores, libraries, and fairs. You can also hand out materials at these places or on the street. You can also ask leaders of churches and other community organizations to hand out materials or allow you to give a talk.

As you make people aware of an issue, you should also be prepared to offer reasonable and practical solutions. You need to state as clearly and as simply as possible why your solution is needed and is the best alternative. In addition, you should ask people to do one or more concrete things to support what you are advocating. For example, you can ask them to: sign a petition, join your organization, give money, volunteer to do something, call or write public officials, or attend an event.

In creating plans for public education you need to find ways of also attracting attention from the media (newspapers, radio, and T.V.). In a later section of this guide suggestions are made on how to gain effective media exposure. While it is important to seek media attention, you will be wise not to depend upon it as your only or primary way of educating the public. In early stages of citizen action it is best to reach out to individuals, groups, and organizations to support your cause. As you are successful, media attention will follow and increase in time.

TIPS:

- 1) Always have written materials to hand out to people;
- 2) Present your facts, arguments, and solutions in as brief, clear, fair, and logical way as possible;
- 3) Use illustrations and graphics to visualize important points;
- 4) Be neat, well dressed, and polite in dealing with the public;
- 5) Be friendly and tolerant even with people that disagree.

- 6) Organize every event and activity as professionally as possible. Write out a plan, but also be flexible;
- 7) Give people materials with your or your organization's name, address, and phone number;
- 8) Give people something to sign to build a mailing list or to obtain their support;
- 9) Thank every person who helps you or listens to you;
- 10) Ask people for their advice and suggestions as to how to best achieve what you want.

LOBBYING OFFICIALS: Ultimately, citizen action involves convincing officials to respond to or adopt a policy you propose. The major ways in which active citizens try to convince public officials is through letters, reports or memos, telephone calls, or meetings.

Before contacting officials it is always necessary to do your homework. In addition to being very clear about the issue that concerns you, the alternative approaches, and the policy action you want to have supported, you need to understand the style and interests of the official or officials you are dealing with and the system of rules and committees by which they make decisions. If you do not know how the game is played you will not be considered a serious player.

How do you find out about the rules of the game and the key players (whether you are dealing with your local school board, city council, county commissioners, public health board, state legislature, etc.)? First, obtain materials such as by-laws, charters, or constitutions that explain how a branch of government or an organization is organized and how decisions are made. Many branches of government have handbooks that describe these things. Organizations such as the League of Women Voters may be able to provide this material. Often teachers of social studies or professors of government at a local or nearby college will be able to give you this information. Your local library is also a good source of information.

You can also get a good briefing by talking to leaders of organizations that have been successful in lobbying the officials you want to influence. Ask them to explain how the system works, what advice they have, who are the key people to see, what kind of approaches are effective or ineffective with different officials, committees, or bodies? In addition, you might want to ask for help and guidance from a local official or representative. Ask them the same questions suggested above. Also, ask them if they will help you with letters of support, by asking an official for you, or by personally introducing you. **REMEMBER:** All politics is personal. Leaders have to trust and depend on each other very often. If you can get someone who is trusted and liked to help you, your work will be a lot easier.

In the last section of this guide, you will find suggestions about HOW TO WRITE A LETTER, HOW TO MAKE EFFECTIVE PHONE CALLS, and HOW TO MAKE A PRESENTATION TO PUBLIC OFFICIALS. These techniques are all important in your efforts to influence officials. However, in addition, do not forget that no matter how good you are at these things, your effectiveness has to be built upon the principles described earlier:

ORGANIZING SUPPORT KNOWING YOUR STUFF EDUCATING THE PUBLIC

When you build upon these principles you will bring several sources of power to your efforts to achieve influence. You will have the power of support of a group, the power of knowledge and ideas, and the power of public influence.

- TIPS:**
- 1) In working with public officials, get to know their assistants and secretary - they can help you and they are influential;
 - 2) Apply the tips for working with the public mentioned earlier;
 - 3) Whenever an official takes the time to meet with you or help you, write them a thank you note;
 - 4) Invite key influential leaders to speak to your group. If they deserve it you might give them an award;

- 5) ALWAYS TELL THE TRUTH. Give well researched and correct information. Credibility is the key to effective lobbying;
- 6) Be yourself - If you are nervous or unsure about something, don't be afraid to say so;
- 7) Provide two or three copies of proposals so one can quickly be given to an assistant and/or to a Committee Chairman;
- 8) Ask if the person will support your proposal and/or help to get others to support it;
- 9) If the official cannot support your proposal, ask why. Find out what parts of it they like, don't like, or would like to see changed;
- 10) Take notes as you will forget much that is said. After a meeting or phone call, review your notes and add points you were not able to write down;
- 11) Explain about your effort, organization, purpose, and extent of support; provide documents that describe these things;
- 12) Leave several sheets or name cards with your name or the names of others to contact, addresses, and phone numbers.

ADVISING POLICY MAKERS

Whereas Citizen Action is a bottoms-up, grassroots effort to influence public officials, there are many times when these same officials ask the public to advise them about issues. Such occasions can provide you with a unique opportunity to influence public policy. It also can help you to become known, respected, and trusted, thereby making future efforts at lobbying easier. In addition, by participating in advisory activities you can increase your knowledge of government and issues.

There are four major types of advisory activities through which citizens help to share public policy.

PUBLIC HEARINGS WRITTEN COMMENTARY ADVISORY COMMITTEES SPECIAL MEETINGS

These four activities are sponsored by both legislative bodies (for example: City Council, School Committee, Selectmen, Town Supervisors, County Commissioner, State Senate or House, or the U.S. Congress) or administrative branches of government (for example: Department of Environmental Affairs, Public Health Commission, Department of Human Services). The announcement of such activities are often presented in the newspaper as a "Public Notice" (sometimes this is required by law). At the federal level, announcements are printed in the Federal Register, a daily publication of the U.S. Government (available in most Libraries and by subscription). Some states have similar daily or weekly digests. At the county, city, or town levels, notices are frequently posted in public buildings. Also, many legislative committees or government agencies keep a mailing to send out announcements of policy advisory activities. You should ask to be put on the mailing list of those bodies that deal with the issue about which you are most concerned.

There is some controversy as to the value and integrity of advisory activities as a form of citizen participation. Some critics claim such activities are window dressing, an attempt to coopt and manipulate citizens, and to gain support for what government officials plan to do anyway.

Sometimes these things are true, but sometimes they are not. Certainly there is nothing wrong with officials wanting to build consensus and support for a public policy. However, no one wants to take part in a sham or waste their time if a policy has really been predetermined and there is no opportunity to seriously shape or change it.

On the other hand, advisory activities are often efforts by public officials to figure out the best policy, approach, or plan. They may really want and need help from interested citizens.

There is no way for you to be sure about the potential and integrity of a citizen participation advisory activity. The best way to find out is to get involved in a few, see what happens, and learn from your experience. You may also find it helpful to know about the following standards for creating effective advisory activities and some of the ways you can be effective.

ADVISORY COMMITTEES: Advisory Committees are most effective when the nature of their responsibility, tasks, and authority are clearly explained in writing by public officials. The outcomes or products of the Committee that are desired should be spelled out. The process of how the Committees recommendations will be reviewed and by whom should be specified. If possible, public officials who will take action on recommendations should meet with the committee for one or several thorough discussions. The Committee should be provided with a reasonable budget and/or staff support.

- TIPS:**
- 1) At the initial meeting suggest these standards;
 - 2) Come to meetings early and stay late to get to know other members personally;
 - 3) At the outset indicate your relevant interests, background, and concerns;
 - 4) Suggest at the beginning that the Committee establish principles and ground rules for conducting meetings as effectively as possible;

- 5) Be active and speak up early, let people know you're really there and interested;
- 6) Keep notes and compare them with minutes that are kept; review your notes before each meeting and refer to them when people may have forgotten an earlier agreement;
- 7) Volunteer for assignments between meetings and carry them out well. Others will appreciate your contributions;
- 8) Get to know the Chairperson, call him or her between meetings or talk to them before or after meetings to offer your services or express a concern (although do not overdo this);
- 9) Do not dominate discussions, give others adequate time to speak, and be a good listener; and
- 10) Do not be afraid to question or disagree with other members, but always do it with respect and objectivity.

PUBLIC HEARINGS: A good Public Hearing has the following characteristics. The major policy makers who will benefit from the hearing will be there throughout. (Be wary and critical if they stay only to hear a few influential people who testify first). Everyone should be permitted to make testimony and the Chairperson of the hearing should make clear how the record will be kept, and how and when it will be available, reviewed, and used. The amount of time each person has to speak should be specified and enforced. A list of who will speak, and in what order, should be provided. Rules about questioning should be made clear, and the time for questioning any persons who testify should have a specific limit that is enforced.

- TIPS:**
- 1) Before the hearing, find out the name of the staff person who is organizing it or the Chairperson and ask them to inform you about the rules and plan for the hearing if you have not received them in writing;
 - 2) Stay as long as possible to hear what other people are saying,

- 3) When you hear a testimony that is particularly good in supporting or opposing your position, meet the person after their presentation, tell them you were impressed, and ask them to give or send you a copy of their testimony;
- 4) Bring a recorder with a counter and write down who began their testimony at what point on your counter. This will save you time in reviewing tapes;
- 5) Write out your testimony. Be sure it is objective, clear, factual, well documented, and to the point;
- 6) Bring extra copies of your testimony for all public officials who are present and others who may be interested. Be sure your name, organizational affiliation, address and phone number is on your testimony (People may contact you);
- 7) Stay within your time limit. You may choose to read or summarize your testimony. Be prepared. Go over your testimony in advance. Have friends or family give you feedback on your style;
- 8) Speak clearly, say something personal at the beginning to indicate your concern for the issue;
- 9) Make eye contact and look at the public officials often;
- 10) Thank the Chair and public officials for the opportunity to present your testimony and tell them you appreciate their interest and concern.

ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

Electoral participation is the most basic and fundamental form of citizen participation in the United States. Voting for leaders who represent us is a right and a responsibility of American citizens. It is important during the teen years to develop understanding of the electoral process, a critical sense of how to judge candidates, and interest in and knowledge about public issues. When you turn 18, register to vote in your Town or City Hall so that you can be eligible to vote in the next election.

Electoral participation includes more than voting, however. It may also include such activities as working for a political party, a candidate, or for a ballot issue. If and when you get involved in electoral politics in these ways, it is possible to: strengthen your potential influence by getting to know political leaders, increase your knowledge of policy issues; and develop skills in organizing and influencing the public.

AN ASIDE: "DIRTY POLITICS": There are many people who are cynical about traditional politics and politicians. You may have read accounts of corruption by some public officials. You may also be aware of the growing practice of negative campaigning in which one candidate smears the reputation of the other or distorts the record or views of an opponent.

These negative practices have "turned off" many Americans to electoral politics. This is unfortunate because if good people do not get involved as voters, candidates, party members, and campaign workers, our system will only go down hill. What our political system needs, always, is for new people to get involved who are positive, idealistic, and reform-minded and who will challenge electoral practices that are dishonest, negative, and misleading. Above all, we always need young people like yourself to step forward and get involved to help improve the political system. If you think a political situation is bad, it is better to get involved than to turn your back or take a walk.

You should be aware that electoral politics is intense, highly competitive, and involves considerable public exposure and controversy. Yet, it is the basis for selecting our public officials and putting issues on the public agenda. It is the crucible of community action, power, and influence. It is also an arena where

young people are welcome and can have great opportunities to learn, make contacts, and make important contributions.

To get involved in electoral politics you need to be clear about a number of things: what are your political beliefs, which party best represents your values, what are the qualities you want in a candidate, and what are the most important issues you want to support?

ABOUT VOTING: Voting in elections is an opportunity you will have throughout your life. If, when you register to vote, you declare to be a member of a political party, you will be eligible to vote in PRIMARY ELECTIONS to select candidates for the party. In regular elections, you will have an opportunity to select which candidate you want from any party, or even a candidate who is independent, for each office. Also, in many cities, towns, counties, and states you will be able to vote for or against policy issues that are placed on a ballot.

Our political system works best if citizens are well informed about candidates and issues. Otherwise we face the danger of people voting for candidates according to superficial reasons like how they appear. To be a well informed voter requires effort. You need to stay informed, listen to and read about candidates, and study the issues that will be on the ballot.

- TIPS:**
- 1) Read the newspaper regularly. If possible, read more than one paper since many papers have political biases;
 - 2) Be critical and very careful about believing candidate advertisements;
 - 3) Do not depend on TV news as your only source of information because TV news filters issues and candidates to meet their brief graphic presentations;
 - 4) Watch TV shows and listen to radio programs that provide in-depth discussion of issues;
 - 5) Attend debates or watch them on TV or listen to them on the radio;

- 6) Write or visit campaign offices and ask for position papers on issues of interest to you;
- 7) Attend events where candidates make speeches;
- 8) Discuss issues and candidates with friends, teachers, and other persons who are well informed;
- 9) Make up your own mind. Think and do not become swayed by the opinions of others; and
- 10) Be sure you are registered to vote and plan your schedule for election day so that you can vote. If you are going to be away from your community be sure to obtain an absentee ballot.

ABOUT CAMPAIGNS: Political campaigns are for one of two purposes: to elect candidates for office or to approve or disapprove a ballot issue. Campaign laws exist at the local, county, state, and federal levels which clarify the requirements for candidates to run for different offices and for the conduct of elections. Most cities and towns, and some counties and states, allow citizens to vote directly on ballot initiatives. The rules for this vary among towns, cities, counties, and states. You should find out about these laws wherever you live. In some cases, issues can be put on the ballot by the local legislative body (Selectmen, City Council, County Commissioners, or State Legislature); and in other cases they can be put on the ballot if a sufficient number of registered voters sign a petition and file it within a prescribed time.

Political campaigns are often exciting events, although some of the work you may do as a campaign worker, especially as young person without experience in campaigns, is not so exciting. You do not begin by writing position papers and speeches for your candidate or cause. (Although if you really know your stuff and are very talented as a writer you might get a shot at this). Most campaign work includes: preparing mailings, typing labels and stuffing envelopes, carrying signs in public, calling people on the telephone, and asking people to sign petitions. Sometimes you may also get a chance to organize or help organize a meeting, public event, or press conference. If you get involved in a political campaign, it can be a great learning opportunity for you. You will learn a lot about people,

issues, and how to organize. To maximize your own learnings, consider the following:

- TIPS:**
- 1) Study about a candidate or issue before you volunteer to be a supporter;
 - 2) Determine how much time, and at what times, you can help;
 - 3) Identify what you want to get out of the experience and share this with those who will be supervising you;
 - 4) Be sure you are clear about any assignment you receive;
 - 5) Feel free to ask for advice on how to do things well;
 - 6) Keep a record of the things you learn, items to read, and the names, addresses and phone numbers of people who impress you and may be of interest to you in the future; and
 - 7) Be creative. Look for better ways to do things. Make suggestions.

VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY SERVICE

Volunteering is something that almost all of us do at different times in our lives. As members of organizations, we are frequently asked or we agree or offer to undertake a task. In addition to this, we get involved as volunteers in two other ways. Sometimes we decide to join an existing volunteer effort that interests us or that we believe is important. There are other times when we see that something needs to be done and we organize a volunteer project.

BEING A GOOD VOLUNTEER: There are good volunteers, fair volunteers, and some not so good volunteers. Just because you volunteer your time does not mean you will be effective. To be a good volunteer requires dedication, a healthy attitude, good skills in working with people, and the ability to learn. The most

important traits of good volunteers are:

- **Being Dependable.** If you say you will do something - do it. If you say you will be somewhere at a certain time - be there.
- **Caring.** You should be interested in the task you care about and you should care about the people with whom you work.
- **Being Positive.** You should bring enthusiasm and a constructive attitude to your volunteer activity.
- **Learning as You Serve.** You should continuously work at improving your knowledge and skills in your volunteer activity. Look at it like school, a sport, or a job. Be the best you can be.
- **Being supportive of others.** Do your thing, but also be ready to help others when they need it.

AVOID THE VOLUNTEER HALL OF SHAME: Do not: Go back on your word, make excuses, blame others, gripe, be disrespectful, act like you know everything, boss other people, criticize other volunteers or leaders, seem like your doing everybody a favor by volunteering, dominate situations, or expect to be told how good you are.

SELECTING A VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY: In selecting a volunteer activity it is important to understand what you want to get out of it. The earlier section of this guide entitled, "Why Get Involved" raises a number of issues you may want to consider in this regard. But in addition to understanding yourself and your motivation, you should also find out more about the volunteer project, the things you would be doing, and the organization with which you would be working. Then, it is important that you take responsibility for seeing that you have a clear assignment and agreement to provide direction for your volunteer activity.

- TIPS:**
- 1) Identify alternative programs or organization and try to figure out what is different and unique about each;
 - 2) Visit any perspective project or activity that you are considering volunteering with and observe what volunteers do;

- 3) Read the literature of any organization or project with which you want to be involved;
- 4) Talk with volunteers and others associated with the project. Ask them what they like and don't like and what other help they need;
- 5) Meet with a leader of the volunteer effort and indicate what you are interested in doing and what you would like to get out of volunteering. Ask them what they might like you to do;
- 6) Establish a clear agreement that identifies: what you would do, when you would do it, how long you would do something, and any other conditions; and
- 7) Evaluate yourself and your experience. Ask for guidance and feedback. Ask for opportunities to review activities and to be able to offer ideas and suggestions. Accept responsibility for good communication.

ORGANIZING A VOLUNTEER EFFORT: If you are going to organize a volunteer effort, you should encourage all prospective volunteers to be aware of the principles suggested above and you should provide ways of seeing that they are implemented in your program or project. From the outset, you should be committed to organizing an excellent volunteer effort. In addition to serving these principles, there are five areas to which you will have to devote attention. These are:

PLANNING: You will need a good written plan to guide your volunteer project. A good plan includes identifying your mission: what you are trying to do. It should include specific actions and activities(objectives) you need to complete to accomplish your goals. The plan should also make clear who is responsible for doing what and by when. You will need a schedule that makes clear when you begin certain activities and when you must complete them.

TIPS: 1) Involve other volunteers in developing the plan;

- 2) Make copies of your plan and distribute it to everyone; and
- 3) Review the plan regularly and revise it as appropriate.

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS: To be successful you will have to recruit other volunteers. To do this you will need to have a project that is important to do and good plan. You will need to provide a good written description of the project, why it is important, what it will achieve, and what you want volunteers to do. In recruiting volunteers you should remember that the best approach is personal. Most people volunteer when they are asked by someone they know, like, and respect.

- TIPS:**
- 1) Write a brochure describing your project and its importance;
 - 2) Write a one page sheet describing why you need volunteers, what they will do, and what they will experience by volunteering;
 - 3) Identify and organize a committee on Volunteer Recruitment. Ask each member to identify and recruit 4 or 5 people;
 - 4) Identify institutions (your school, church, local college) in which people might be interested in your project. Contact and meet with a key person in each organization and ask them to help you recruit volunteers;
 - 5) Hold a special event for people who might be interested in your project;
 - 6) Advertise volunteer opportunities in newsletters of organizations and local newspapers; and
 - 7) Contact leaders of community organizations (Churches, Rotary Club, etc.) and ask them to announce the need for volunteers in your project.

TRAINING VOLUNTEERS: Once you attract volunteers you have to give them direction. You should provide them with good written information and guidelines

about your project and what you want them to do. You should also provide opportunities for them to continue to learn things about the issue with which you are concerned and to develop and improve skills related to their volunteer activity.

- TIPS:**
- 1) Prepare a package of written materials for all new volunteers;
 - 2) Provide an "ORIENTATION SESSION" for new volunteers. Use experienced volunteers to manage this once your project is established;
 - 3) Look for, select, photo copy, and distribute articles to your volunteers that are relevant to your issue and their services;
 - 4) Provide ongoing clinic or training sessions to help your volunteers obtain information or develop new skills relevant to their volunteer responsibilities; and
 - 5) Involve volunteers on a regular basis in evaluating your program and making revisions in your plans, policies, and approaches.

SUPERVISING VOLUNTEERS: Once people are recruited, trained, and engaged as volunteers, you have to supervise them to assure they are effective. It is important that you make clear to them at the outset that your project has standards and that you want to help them to be as effective as possible. To this end you should provide both training and supervision. Supervision is very important to your project to assure quality and success.

- TIPS:**
- 1) Assign one or several people who are responsible for supervising other volunteers;
 - 2) Create a list describing "Standards of Excellence" that clarifies the qualities of outstanding volunteer performance. This provides criteria to help in evaluating volunteers;
 - 3) Train your volunteer supervisors in how to be effective helpers and supervisors. Provide them with materials or a training

program on supervision, and

- 4) Hold regular group meetings to evaluate how your program is going and to deal with issues of concern to volunteers.

REWARDING AND NURTURING VOLUNTEERS: Beyond training and supervision, you need to find other ways of encouraging and rewarding volunteers. You should make them feel good and confident about what they are doing and about the progress of your project. They should feel that they are a part of a larger effort. Create events that recognize their efforts and reinforce their commitment.

- TIPS:**
- 1) Create a newsletter that describes volunteer activities and acknowledges the contributions of volunteers;
 - 2) Hold regular events at which you personally acknowledge individuals for their contribution;
 - 3) Call people every few months or a couple of times a year. Ask them how they feel the project is going and what suggestions they have. Tell them how much you appreciate their efforts;
 - 4) Make quarterly, bi-annual, or annual awards to volunteers,
 - 5) Ask good volunteers to serve on committees, become officers, or supervise other volunteers;
 - 6) Send out news stories (after you obtain permission from the volunteer), describing their contributions; and
 - 7) Write letters to volunteers telling them how much you appreciate their contributions.

THE ACTION CLINIC

The first part of this guide has argued for the importance of teen involvement in community life, it has described four types of community involvement activities, and it has offered tips on how you can be effective as an

active citizen. The remainder of the guide will offer more practical suggestions in areas in which you will need to develop skills if you are to become effective in community action. These skills, it should be noted, are also important in other areas of your life as well. They can help you to be a better student, leader, or worker.

Beyond the skills you acquire, there is something even more important that will help you to make a significant impact upon your community. The ultimate source of your power rests within you and is built upon the foundation of your knowledge and values. What will influence people ultimately is not only how you can do things, but the substance of your ideas and beliefs and how you demonstrate these things in your behavior.

BECOMING AN ACTIVE AND CRITICAL LEARNER

You do not have to know everything to be effective. Yet, you do have to be able to learn on an ongoing basis. Beyond knowing facts about things, you also need to be able to discover new information and to determine its meaning. What this means, above all, is that you need to be an eager learner and a critical thinker. You need to know that learning is not something that takes place only in school, but it is a life-long process. In this sense, you need to become responsible and active in your own learning. You need to own it, be in charge of it, and to discover the energy and direction within yourself to pursue questions, issues, and ideas. As you do this, you should learn to question things and become a critical thinker. This does not mean criticizing or being disagreeable. What it does mean is to continuously try to understand what is true and right and what is not. It means looking beyond the surface and trying to get a deeper understanding of what things mean. It means probing, questioning, and wondering. It means being able to dissect knowledge and to figure out how to put different kinds of information and ideas together in new ways. As you learn to be an active learner and thinker you will discover a source of power that can help you throughout your life.

THE PRACTICAL MEANING OF VALUES

One of the most important influences in how you think and how you translate

your thinking into action is your own values. Values consist of beliefs about the ultimate meaning of life; criteria for judging what is true and good; principles that should guide relations between people, and ideas about how to best organize society and different activities within it.

The values of most teens are shaped by their parents and their religious training. In addition, other influential people such as teachers, coaches, relatives, and friends influence our values. To be sure, not everyone believes the same thing. This is particularly true in America because of our great traditions of individualism and pluralism. However, despite differences in peoples beliefs, there are some commonly shared beliefs to which almost every religious group subscribes and which provide the basis for what might be called a "civic religion" in America. Among these values are:

Being honest in dealings with others;

Being respectful of other people and their property;

Being tolerant of the differences in others;

Being fair and just in dealing with others;

Being helpful to others.

You could undoubtedly add to this list as there are many other values that are important. These five values are mentioned not to preach to you about their necessity, but rather they are mentioned because of their practical power. What is vital about these values is that if you reflect them in your attitudes and practices in dealing with others, you will increase your capacity to influence others and to maximize your impact upon community life. As you consider the suggestions that follow, keep in mind that in all you do, your values will shape how you do them. It is not enough to merely perform well. What is most important are the qualities you bring to your performance based upon the beliefs that define you as a person and which are the ultimate source of your personal power to make a difference.

HOW TO PLAN FOR ACTION

Good planning is the key to any good community action project. A good plan is reflected in a process and a document. The best process is a matter of getting others who will carry out and support the plan to be strongly committed to it. The best way for this to happen is to have these people participate as fully as possible in developing the plan. Opportunities should be provided for people to share their concerns, ideas, and suggestions in writing and in group discussion.

In addition to participation, a good plan is guided by information. One or several people should be responsible for seeing that appropriate information is gathered and made available to all who participate in planning (see the earlier section on Determining Community Needs). Often planning takes place in several stages and through a number of meetings. Between meetings additional information is often gathered.

A planning document should reflect a group's agreement on what it intends to achieve and how this will be accomplished. Goals, objectives, and action plans are three ways of clarifying these things. GOALS are the major end-states to be achieved. For example, a goal of a group that wants to increase services to teenagers in a community might be: "To provide positive recreational opportunities for all teenagers in the community." This goal, in and of itself points in a direction, but it does not tell you much. So, you have to determine the different steps that are necessary and constitute "positive recreational activities." OBJECTIVES describe such steps. So, for examples, two objectives to achieve the goal described above might be: 1) "To organize a drop-in Center by October 1, 1990 that will be open for teenagers on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday evenings", and 2) "To provide dances at the Community Hall every Saturday night for teenagers beginning in November, 1990."

Each objective should also include ACTION STEPS that spell out who must do what and by when to accomplish each objective. Once action plans are completed, a SCHEDULE can be drawn up that clarifies when certain activities begin and when they are to be completed. When all of these things are included in a written plan it can be used to help manage project activities and to evaluate progress.

TIPS: 1) Get and study copies of planning documents from other groups

that have completed successful projects that detail goals, objectives, action steps and schedule;

- 2) Show these plans to others who will be planning with you to give them an idea of what a good plan looks like;
- 3) If possible, find an advisor with experience in planning to help you;
- 4) Use "brainstorming" - a process in which people quickly share as many ideas as possible without evaluating or discussing them. List all ideas on blank newsprint;
- 5) Good questions to guide brainstorming are: What do we want to achieve? What are the best ways to achieve it? What are the biggest problems or obstacles? What resources are available to us?;
- 6) After your brainstorm you can discuss the merits of different ideas and add to them;
- 7) You can also prioritize goals and objectives. Ask: Which are the 5 most important in priority order. Have people write down their priorities or record their preferences next to each item that is written on the newspad;
- 8) Have one person write an original draft of a plan and make copies for the next meeting. Then have people review and offer suggestions for changes that the person will incorporate in the next draft of the plan. It usually takes 2 or 3 sessions of review to achieve agreement on a plan.

HOW TO RUN EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

A lot of time can be wasted in meetings because of lack of planning and inadequate leadership. To run an effective meeting, you should be very clear about

the purposes. What do you want to achieve? How much time do you need to spend in informing people, hearing reports, planning, making decisions, and making assignments? The best way to give a meeting focus and direction is to have a written agenda. If it is possible, send the agenda to people ahead of time. Another good approach is to print the agenda in large letters on a large blank newsprint pad. Ask people if they agree with the agenda, have anything to add, or would suggest changing the order of the agenda.

A good chairperson or leader of a meeting should be firm, fair, and flexible. Her or his role is to keep the group focused on its agenda, allow sufficient discussion, do not let one or two people dominate, occasionally ask people who are silent what they think, and see that clear decisions are made.

- TIPS:**
- 1) Be sure someone takes notes and prepares copies to review at future meetings;
 - 2) Use blank newsprint sheets to write down peoples ideas during discussion. Seeing things written helps to keep discussion flowing and directed;
 - 3) Try to always achieve agreement by consensus if possible rather than voting;
 - 4) Do not avoid disagreements. Clarify different positions and ask people to summarize the best arguments for opposing positions;
 - 5) Provide or develop with the group a list of ground rules for productive meetings. List desired and undesirable behaviors;
 - 6) Provide a little time before or at the conclusion of the meeting for people to socialize. Start or end the meeting with refreshments and a time for informal conversation; and
 - 7) Evaluate your meetings. Ask someone to be an observer and give the group feedback. Take 5 or 10 minutes at the end of the meeting for people to say what they liked, didn't like, or would like to see changed at the next meeting.

HOW TO WRITE A PERSUASIVE LETTER

Writing letters to public officials can be an effective way to get their attention and support. Although officials receive many letters, they receive few that are really thorough and persuasive. If you can write a particularly good letter, you stand a very good chance of influencing them.

What makes a persuasive letter? Above all it must reflect that you know what you are talking about. It is not enough to merely state your concern or preference. You must provide relevant information, logical arguments, and suggestions that are practical as well as creative. In addition, an effective letter puts the issue in practical context. It refers to a particular piece of legislation or it suggests a very specific action you want the official to take that is possible for them to do. Also, if possible, make reference to views, interests, ideas, or legislation associated with the public official that is relevant to or supports your views. Give them a sense that you know something about them and appreciate them. Finally, indicate any benefits that they may experience by supporting your position.

- TIPS:**
- 1) Try to keep your letter to no more than two pages (you can attach position papers, reports, etc.);
 - 2) Do not say you are a teen unless you do so at the end of the letter;
 - 3) Be certain you have the correct spelling, title, and address (call the official's office if you are not sure);
 - 4) Use stationery with letterhead or type your name and address at the top of each page;
 - 5) Be sure to type the letter;
 - 6) Be certain the letter is grammatically correct, reads well, and has no typographical errors. Have one or two other people review and edit it;

- 7) Say what you want in the first sentence or two. For example:
"Dear Commissioner Jones:

As a resident of Goodtown, I ask for your assistance in addressing a critical need in our community. I would like to request that you...

- 8) Be direct and personable;
- 9) Include a telephone number where you can be reached and indicate the best time of day to reach you;
- 10) Close the letter by saying that you look forward to a reply at their earliest convenience.

HOW TO USE THE TELEPHONE EFFECTIVELY

The telephone is an important tool to help you in community involvement activities. You can use the telephone to:

- 1) Ask people to support your campaign, candidate, or project;
- 2) Poll them on their views or preferences regarding a candidate or an issue;
- 3) Keep in communication with campaign or project volunteers;
- 4) Remind supporters to vote; and
- 5) Lobby public officials or members of their staff.

To use the telephone most effectively you want to reach people you are calling as quickly as possible and achieve your goal as quickly as possible. To do this requires you to be very clear about what you want to say or ask. The best bet is to write out a script if you (and other volunteers) are making many calls for the

same purpose. If you are making only one important call, such as to an important public official, it is also helpful to outline what you want to say so that you do not forget things.

WHEN you call is important since there are optimum times to reach people. If you are calling the general public, evening is best. Early morning is a good time for most officials before meetings begin. If you are having difficulty reaching an official, ask whomever answers the phone when you should call back. Also be prepared to leave your phone number and the time at which you can be reached.

STYLE is important. Do not speak too slowly or too fast. Be personable but professional. Introduce yourself at the outset and explain your reason for calling. After you do this, ask the person if they would be willing to talk with you for a few minutes. If they say they are busy, ask if there is a good time to call them back. Always be polite, never argue, do not use slang words, and thank people when you finish the call. Reflect enthusiasm for your cause without being overbearing.

RECORDS are very important in telephone use. You can increase your effectiveness by being well organized. Develop neat lists with peoples telephone numbers. Leave space next to the persons name and number for whatever helpful information you may need, such as their address (if you plan to send them a mailing), their position on an issue, if they agreed to do something, etc. Clear clutter from around your phone and lay out materials neatly so that you can easily find and keep track of things.

- TIPS:**
- 1) Maintain a personal address book to record the names, addresses, and phone numbers of people you may contact regularly;
 - 2) Use a pencil so you can erase addresses or numbers when people move;
 - 3) Leave a message pad and pen next to your phone to keep incoming messages; and
 - 4) If a number of volunteers will be making calls, have a training session for them. Have them practice by role-playing with each

other.

HOW TO MAKE PRESENTATIONS BEFORE PUBLIC OFFICIALS

There are two ways in which you may have an opportunity to present your views to groups of public officials. One is at public hearings at which you give testimony (discussed earlier), and the second is when you are invited or allowed to speak at a meeting of a group (such as the County Commissioners, the City Council, the School Board, etc.). As with public hearings, you should be clear about the amount of time you have and whether there will be time for questions.

Whenever you make a public presentation you should be well organized. Write out your remarks or have an outline (whichever is most comfortable and effective for you). Remember that effective presentations are a combination of substance and style. Your information has to be correct and relevant and your arguments have to be logical and persuasive. There is no substitute for good preparation. At the same time, you need to present your views in as interesting a way as possible.

Everybody has a different style and you need to develop one that is comfortable for you. An appropriate humorous comment or joke in the beginning of a presentation can help to relax a group, but you have to determine if you are good or comfortable in using humor. You should always be neat and well dressed, be as at ease as possible, and try to appear confident without being arrogant. If you can stand to make a presentation it is preferable. Be as dynamic as possible without being flamboyant and don't be afraid to smile and express your personality.

Graphics are a good supplement to presentations. As appropriate, bring a few large charts or diagrams to portray major points. Be sure there is an easel or stand for them and that the letters and illustrations are large, clear, and easy to read from a distance. You may want someone to help you set them up and change them during your presentation.

You should plan your presentation in three parts: the beginning, major central part, and the closing. In the beginning, work at creating interest, setting a

good tone, and making clear why you are there and what you want. The central part of your presentation includes presenting your most important information and arguments. Your greatest challenge is to keep people's attention during this time. The use of humor, graphics, more animation or movement, or mentioning that you have only one or two more points you want to make about two-thirds of the way through your presentation may sustain group interest. Your closing should be brief and strong. You may even want to move a step forward or to the side and pause for a moment to make clear that it is a time for closure and it is important. Repeat or make your most important argument or request in closing. Have an inspiring quote or a well-phrased and somewhat dramatic short statement of a few sentences at the very end.

- TIPS:**
- 1) Never talk too long. Stay within your time limit;
 - 2) Be yourself and be as comfortable as possible;
 - 3) If you are nervous before you begin, take several deep breaths;
 - 4) Assume the officials are people who like you;
 - 5) If you are very nervous say something like, "I am a little nervous, but I am glad I am here because...";
 - 6) Thank them for listening to you at the beginning and end of your presentation and;
 - 7) If you read your remarks, look up from time to time and keep your finger on where you are in the text.

HOW TO USE NETWORKS AND COALITIONS

Communicating and cooperating with other groups is a very helpful way to strengthen any community involvement effort you undertake. There is much that you can learn from other organizations and by working with them you can often achieve results that you could not achieve on your own.

NETWORKING AND COALITIONS are the two most common forms of cooperation between groups. Networking involves the sharing of information among a selected group of leaders and their organization about issues of mutual concern. As you develop a community initiative, you can benefit by becoming a part of an existing network or by creating one of your own. The approaches to networking are quite simple. You can begin by finding out the names of other groups and leaders who are involved with the same community issue or activity. Call several of these leaders and meet with them. Ask them for their advice and help. Ask them for the names of others with whom it would be good to meet. Share materials with each other. If appropriate, ask them to be advisors to your group or attend events. Call each other and meet together from time to time. Attend their meetings or events if you are asked. If you would find it beneficial, organize a meeting of representatives of organization to share common concerns, plans, and ideas.

COALITIONS are more formal and more directed to a specific goal than are networks. A coalition is an agreement between a number of groups to achieve one or several specific things that are in the interest of each group. Effective coalitions require developing joint plans, written agreements, and coordination. Coalitions are formed to lobby for an issue, to educate the public, or to undertake one or several activities to help people. If your group is going to join or organize a coalition you should obtain agreement among your members, be certain about the responsibilities and obligations of coalition members, designate representatives to attend coalition meetings, and obtain agreement among all members on policies to support and activities to undertake.

TIPS ON NETWORKING:

- 1) Create a list with the addresses and phone numbers of people who are a part of your network. Use it as a mailing list and send them information from time to time;
- 2) Attend meetings of other groups, meet new people who may be able to help you, and arrange to meet with them;
- 3) Ask people to put your name on their mailing list;
- 4) As you get to know people, ask them if it would be all right for

you to call them for information or advise occasionally;

- 5) Keep notes and records of the particular experience, interests and skills of different people who are a part of your network. Refer to your records when you need help;
- 6) Inform those who are a part of your network about others you know who might be helpful to them; and
- 7) Be on the lookout for ways to help or create opportunities for people who are a part of your network.

TIPS ON COALITIONS:

- 1) Appoint representatives and alternates to a coordinating committee;
- 2) Print a list of organizations, representatives, and alternatives with addresses and phone numbers and distribute it to all members;
- 3) Select a chairperson and secretary;
- 4) Develop a written coalition agreement;
- 5) Hold regular meetings of the coordinating committee;
- 6) Call representatives who miss meetings to brief them on what happened;
- 7) Send out minutes after every meeting so that all groups will be aware of what is happening;
- 8) Be on the lookout for new groups that will strengthen the coalition;
- 9) Achieve early and regular success even in modest coalition efforts to build confidence and commitment; and

- 10) Create joint events from time to time so that leaders and members of different groups can get to know one other and develop a sense of diversity and strength of the coalition.

HOW TO PUBLICIZE YOUR CAUSE OR PROJECT

There are three public media sources through which you can publicize your community involvement activities: the press (newspapers and magazines), radio stations, and television stations. While each media differs, there are some important ways in which they are all alike. You should remember:

- There is always competition to gain media attention. However, the media must report and comment on news every day. So you always have a chance to get publicity;
- News Directors, Editorial Directors, and Community Service Directors are the key managers who decide what is newsworthy;
- Reporters do the work. They are usually assigned stories to cover, but often they like to get leads for their own stories;
- Reporters usually are specialists. In larger publications, reporters specialize in areas such as sports, neighborhood stories, business, world affairs, state issues, city government, religion, education, the environment, etc.;
- There are multiple ways in which your organization can receive media attention, such as through a news story, a public service announcement listing of an event, mention in an editorial, an interview, by writing a column or a letter to the editor, or appearing on a special program.

To achieve maximum and effective media coverage you need to understand these general points about how the media is organized and the various ways in which you can obtain publicity. To obtain good publicity you need to think and plan like a good public relations director. Try to figure out what events, ideas, people,

and activities associated with your community involvement activity are newsworthy. Ask yourself, what is important, different, or interesting about what we are doing and how we are doing it? Then try to figure out the best match with the different types of media exposure that are available to you.

CONTACTING THE PRESS: Your first challenge, after developing some ideas on how you might obtain media coverage, is to develop contact with the press. The two major approaches to this are to visit informally with editors and reporters, and to send out press releases. In either case, you need to begin by doing your homework. This includes getting the names and addresses of the editors of local newspapers, magazines, TV stations, and radio stations.

It is probably unrealistic for you to visit a lot of editors and reporters. What you might do is to ask some of the people with whom you are networking which publications or stations, editors or reporters, they think would be most interested in your cause or project. Call the editors or reporters. Tell them about what you are doing and ask if you can meet with them. When you do, be sure to bring written material discussing your initiative. Ask for their advice in obtaining publicity. Follow up on their suggestions and stay in touch with them.

A **PRESS RELEASE** is the basic method of contacting the media. It is usually a one or two page, typed, double spaced description of something you think is newsworthy. Press releases should be printed on your stationery or if you do not have stationery, type the name of your group with an address at the top. On the left hand side of the page, a few columns down, list the name and phone number of a "Contact Person" who can be called to provide more information to reporters.

The press release should begin with an attention getting title. (For example, "Teens Organize to Fight Drugs," "Youth to Rally to Support School Budget," "Kids Propose new Program to Police," "Young People to Help the Elderly.") Following the title, provide a sub-title that summarizes the substance of your effort in a short sentence. (For example, "Rally Scheduled at City Hall on Sunday Afternoon," "Teen Report Lists 10 recommendations," or "Youth Organize Clean-up of Filthy Vacant Lots in four Neighborhoods.")

The remainder of your press release should describe in more detail what has happened or will happen or what is proposed. A good approach is to quote one or two group leaders or a public official or well known public leader who supports

you. (For example, "Teen leader Jason Cox said, "95% of us do not use drugs. We want people to know this and we want to work with the police to get rid of drug dealers in our neighborhoods." or, "Mayor Carolyn Gray says, "I am proud of these young people. They are demonstrating the hope of our city's future. We should all listen to them and give them our support."

BUILDING MEDIA ATTENTION: Beyond press releases, you should attempt to increase the extent and depth of coverage of your efforts.

PRESS CONFERENCES provide one way of doing this. A Press Conference is a special meeting you organize for reporters, usually before or after something important that your group does. To attract reporters, send out a Press Release. On a cover page provide a "Press Advisory" that announces when and where a press conference will be held to provide further information about the accompanying press release. At a press conference be sure to have a spokesperson who explains the rules for the conference, introduces speakers, and coordinates the discussion.

INFORMATIONAL BRIEFINGS are meetings you hold with editors and reporters of a newspaper or radio or television station. You arrange meetings like this with editors and reporters and visit their offices with several other leaders of your organization. You describe your concerns and activities to them and answer their questions.

PRESS PACKETS OR KITS are collections of materials that describe what your group does. A good press packet includes news releases, brochures, descriptions of programs, and articles about your group. Press packets should be prepared for Press Conferences and Informational Briefings.

- TIPS:**
- 1) Develop a mailing list of editors and reporters to send press releases;
 - 2) Organize informational briefings with the most popular newspapers, radio, and TV stations;
 - 3) Develop a list of newsletters of other organizations. Send information, notices, and press releases to their editors on a regular basis. Call the editors and ask them to include your material;

- 4) Create Public Service Announcements (PSAs) for local TV and radio stations. Use the same format as press releases but entitle them "Public Service Announcement." Prepare 10, 30, and 60 second announcements. Remember it takes about 10 seconds for every 20 words. For TV, include good quality slides that show your project activity or which graphically illustrate your concerns;
- 5) Use your local Cable Television Station. They are usually eager for programs. Meet with officials and develop programs with them.
- 6) Contact producers of weekly public affairs programs or talk shows and get your most articulate spokespersons to appear;
- 7) Always write or call editors or reporters to thank them for any positive exposure;
- 8) Write occasional "Opinion-Editorial" columns for local newspapers, TV, and radio stations;
- 9) Write occasional "Letters to the Editor" in your local newspapers; and
- 10) Write or have written articles in local magazines about your community involvement activities.